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“~~Radical~~”: Marianne Moore and the Revision of Modernism[1]

Aurore Clavier

1 “Omissions are not accidents.” Few epigraphs have tantalized readers as consistently as Marianne Moore’s defying opening to her 1967 *Complete Poems*. Originally sent as a reply to her editor’s concerns about the spectacular cuts she had imposed on her last collection, the quip has come to crystallize, in its placement as well as its form, the ironical contradictions at work in the author’s “final” *opus*. As a lapidary comment on the art of writing, it appears to condense, in one short formula, the language of rupture and compression defended by the first modernist manifestoes more than half a century earlier. Yet, as a threshold partially barring access to what it opens onto, the sentence also seems to undermine, through its terseness and negative construction, the artistic achievement seemingly claimed by the title, if not the very inscription of the poet’s *oeuvre* into the “tradition of the new” (Harold Rosenberg, 1960). While pointing to the many latent corrections of the work, the corrective therefore provides a clue that is also a riddle ; within the space of its four words, it draws up a reading grid working towards its own unraveling and silence and invites the reader to locate the interstices left by verbal excision, as much as the poet’s authorial position within her corpus and the canon at large. One is therefore led to wonder : are Moore’s erasures mere radical breaks that seek to perpetuate the poetics of “violence and precision” beyond “the futurist moment” (Perloff, 2003) ? Or could it be that her revising practice rather creates a space for alternative literary histories, dissenting from the revolutionary dynamics of rejection and renewal ? While entailing a wide range of gestures such as correction, compression, drastic reconfiguration, or even the more paradoxical conversion of text into endnotes, Moore’s revisions often stemmed from a common act of striking out, earning her a reputation as a radical poet. Yet it seems equally tempting to read such emendations as obeying the more normative bias of linguistic—if not moral—correction. However, reading between the lines of the blue pencil, one might perceive her emendations as neither subversive, nor conservative, but rather adaptive. Indeed, whether they respond to writing and publishing circumstances or correspond to the author’s own idiosyncrasies, these alterations have enabled endless

refashionings of the texts, thereby unsettling the very notion of a constituted corpus. As a consequence, Moore's revisionary mode of writing does not only raise stylistic issues while providing a wealth of variations and issues to the geneticist, but also invites us to reassess the history of modernism along the lines of an evolutionary rather than revolutionary paradigm.

Blue-Pencil Modernism

(Un)making it New, or the Slashed Preamble

2 If Moore's resistance to categorizing and generalization were not better known, one might be tempted to first read Moore's epigraph as a distant echo to the history of modernism itself, and to its beginnings in particular. As Hannah Sullivan has shown in her 2013 study *The Work of Revision*, modernist authors integrated textual emendation to their creative and editorial practices more than ever before—and more visibly than ever after in the word-processor age—to the point where, in the contemporary literary culture inherited from the period, "heavy and intensive revision has become an indicator of authorial integrity and the difficulty and seriousness of the revised artwork" (2). This mutation was certainly made possible by the deep material changes occurring at the turn of the century, including the increased availability of paper, the use of the type-writer as a supplement to handwritten drafts, the multiplication of proof-reading stages prior to publication, and a system of patronage that showed rather favorable to the ever-revising artist. However, Sullivan argues, these modernized working conditions were inextricably linked to a broader aesthetic turn, which saw the rise of a new conception of the artist's creative process and revolutionary ethos. While romantic genius was believed to surge in a spontaneous flow of inspiration that could only fade or tarnish with subsequent revision, its modernist counterpart thrived on endless tinkering, which often led to enhanced opacity despite the authors' claims to immediacy, a sign Bob Perelman analyzes as the source for their "aura of illegible authority" and "lure for endless study" (1).[2]

3 If, the latter's critical focus on boundless pieces of "life-writing" suggests, modernist revising often meant virtually unlimited accretion, as in the case of Joyce's *Ulysses*, it could also be, just as frequently, synonymous with drastic cuts and reductions. Most strikingly, the genesis of the movement is commonly perceived through a series of foundational acts of crossing-out. In her memoir of Ezra Pound, H.D. thus reminisced his elisions to her manuscript of "Hermes of the Ways"—up to her very signature—a pruning famously equated to the invention of Imagisme : "I was 21 when Ezra left and it was some years later that he scratched 'H.D. Imagiste,' in London, in the Museum tea room, at the bottom of a typed sheet, now slashed with his creative pencil, 'Cut this out, shorten this line.' H.D.—Hermes—Hermeticism and all the rest of it" (H.D., 1979, 40). Less than a decade later, the same blue pencil would again work its way through "the manuscript of a sprawling chaotic poem called *The Waste Land*" which would "leave [Pound]'s hands, reduced to about half its size, in the form in which it appears in print" (Eliot, 1946 ; quoted in Sullivan, 121). Even before the publication of the *facsimile* edition of Eliot's emended drafts, traces of the legendary collaboration would thus gape here and there in the implicit voids left among the decaying waste and "roots that clutch," announced by the slightly more visible hallmark of Eliot's dedication to "Ezra Pound, *il*

miglior fabbro," a neatly brief stitch covering up—along with a quotation from Petronius' *Satyricon*—a former, longer epigraph removed at *the better craftsman*'s suggestion. And as Sullivan reminds us, while playing the "*Sage Homme*" for his peers, handling his literary scalpel in order to practice "the Caesarean operation[s]" he deemed necessary for the perpetual birthing of the new, Pound endlessly edited his own beginnings, from the reduction of his thirty-line description of a Parisian subway vision to the famous haiku known as "In a Station of the Metro," from the dense historical layering of his "Homage to Sextus Propertius," to its condensed translation as "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley,"[3] or more broadly, from the derivative "collection of stale creampuffs," as he once described his early poems, to *A Draft of XXX Cantos*, which, though hardly shorter, placed the process of elision and on-going composition at its core.

4 Whether one then chooses to view 1913 as "the cradle of modernism," in the wake of Jean-Michel Rabaté's synchronic study (Rabaté, 2007), to start anew in 1922—year one in a Poundian calendar published in *The Little Review*, and set for Michael North's "return to the scene of the modern" (North, 1922)—or to get caught in the whirl of unprecedented *-isms* that burst in-between, everywhere the contemporary reader is invited to gaze at retrospective piles of paper scraps and ruled-out lines, as if the discarded fragments of rough drafts were meant to show through polished corpuses, and the blots of literary creation should be made visible in order to give their very shape to revolutionary poetics, in a close entanglement of the tentative and the definite. Read in this light, striking through would not only express "a preference for a reduced, dieted-down style rather than intrinsic brevity," meaning, according to Sullivan, that "'excess of adjectives' may be allowed in the first draft, but surplus material must be winnowed *before the final version*" for the full effect of brevity, ellipsis and clashing to be felt (Sullivan, 2013, 105 ; emphasis mine). Rather, crossed-out words, like the visual transcription of Pound's "don'ts" or Williams' "no ideas but in things" would seem to spell out a negative manifesto in which left-out fragments turn out to be as significant as the remaining body of the work in the process of informing "the new."

Scrapings of Poetry, Chips of History : the Transmuted Material

5 As Pierre-Marc de Biasi explains in his genetic typology of crossing-out, the French *rature*, even more than its English equivalent, is expressive of this material survival, since it is also a technical term deriving from the close form *raclure* (scraping), which designates the metal grains and shavings produced by the craftsman's chiseling, filing and polishing, particles that could even be used by goldsmiths to test the value of the alloy making up an object, through a process beautifully called "*l'essai à la rature*" (the scraping test) (De Biasi, 2-3). Precisely, similar material operations profoundly shaped early modernist poems and criticism, fascinated as they were by the techniques of sculpture and carving, or by extension, by the geological, archeological and mining metaphors of digging and unearthing. Not only do these images actuate the modernist wish to excavate the historical depths lying beneath the complex surfaces of modernist texts, whose revised forms therefore appear "*deeper* and more fundamental than the original version" (Sullivan, 34 ; emphasis mine), but they also tend to transmute written language into hard and raw substance, left for the poet to chip off and chisel into. Such was, for example, the quality Pound kept looking for, from Imagisme to the

work of Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, before he attempted to describe its literary value and genesis in an essay entitled "The Hard and the Soft in French Poetry" :

> By "hardness" I mean a quality which is in poetry nearly always a virtue—I can think of no case where it is not. By softness I mean an opposite quality which is not always a fault. Anyone who dislikes these textural terms may lay the blame on Théophile Gautier, who certainly suggests them in *Emaux et Camées* ; it is this hardness that I had first in mind. He exhorts us to cut in hard substance, the shell and the Parian. (Pound, 1918, 264-65)

6 As these introductory lines suggest, and as the rest of the essay confirms, the sculptural categories of "the hard and the soft," and the corollary opposition between carving and modeling the material out, do not only serve as creative principles guiding composition but also become critical criteria for Pound to sort out artists and styles, comparing French and English poetry, or evaluating various degrees of solidity in their respective authors. It was neither the first nor the last time Pound resorted to such a method of assessment, and sculpture was certainly not the only metaphor to enable critical exclusions. From the explosive rejections listed up in the pages of *Blast* to "How to Read" and its occultation of scientific failure in the name of historical teleology,[4] one can recognize Pound's propensity to select and discard, both as poet and critic. If indeed, in the early stages of literary creation, the blue pencil becomes the visible mark of the sought-after ideals of textual hardness, compression and efficiency, the strokes it draws across previous writings do not fail to materialize a larger desire to shape the great narrative of modernism by ruling names out as well as the words inherited from them, bypassing artistic forebears in order to invent new lines of continuity. One only needs to proceed a little deeper into "The Hard and the Soft in French Poetry" to observe how Gautier's art also provides a technique to cut into the hard material of literature at large :

> We have in English a certain gamut of styles : we have the good Chaucerian, almost the only style in English where "softness" is tolerable ; we have the good Elizabethan ; which is not wholly un-Chaucerian ; and the bad, or muzzy, Elizabethan ; and the Miltonic, which is a bombastic and rhetorical Elizabethan coming from an attempt to write English with Latin syntax. [...] We have Pope, who is really the Elizabethan satiric style, more or less born out of Horace, and a little improved or at least regularized. [...] And after that we have "isms" and "eses" : the pseudo-Elizabethanism—i.e., bad Keats ; and the romantics, Swinburnese, Browningese, neo-celticism. And how the devil a poet writing English manages to find or make a language for poems is a mystery. (Pound, 1918, 267-8)

7 Surely, this mode of literary revaluation and exclusion is not limited to the poet or his epoch, but typifies any (re)construction of the canon. However, the revisionist practices of modernist authors give particular acuteness to the scoring through exemplified by Pound's method, a technique of reading, pencil in hand, that would only harden with time, evolving from the deductive pedagogy of his first essays to the cultural imperialism of the 1930s, as Catherine Paul has shown in her analysis of "Italian Fascist Exhibitions and Ezra Pound's Move to the Imperial" (2005). As is well known, literary history would long bear the mark of such slashes, shaped as it was by subsequent hackings of the modernist canon, from the critics' election of a reductive male "modernist quartet" (Lentricchia), to the limiting debates over Pound's or Stevens's era called into question by Marjorie Perloff, not to mention the amnesia that

often caused critics to bypass after-war poetry in their mapping out of artistic legacies, as denounced by Clément Oudart (2010).

Crossing Out or Setting Right ? The Double Edge of Correction

The Art of Removing : Miss Moore's "Various Scalpels"

8 Alternatively counted among the central fashioners of modernism or as a mere parenthetical oddity in literary history, Marianne Moore has not escaped the aberrations imposed by such literary reconfigurations, "caused in part," Cristanne Miller suggests, "by her own publishing and behavior patterns" (21). Before she started unstitching and reshuffling her own corpus though, few doubted her association with the language of rupture at its most radical, as the early critical assessments of her work indicate. Among her first admirers, H.D. praised the poet's solid craftsmanship in an article written soon after she recognized her former Bryn Mawr classmate among *The Egoist* contributors :

> Miss Moore turns her perfect craft as the perfect craftsman must inevitably do, to some direct presentation of beauty, clear, cut in flowing lines, but so delicately that the very screen she carves seems meant to stand only in that serene palace of her own world of inspiration—frail, yet as all beautiful things are, absolutely hard—and destined to endure longer, far longer than the toppling sky scrapers, and the world of shrapnel and machine-guns in which we live. (H.D., 1916, 118)

9 Discovering her poems, along with Mina Loy's, in the pages of the 1917 *Others* anthology, Ezra Pound, identified a similar "arid clarity, not without beauty" which he attributed to "*le tempérament de l'Américaine* [sic]" (1918b, 58), before sifting her work through his long tested critical sieve. "Laforgue's influence or some kindred tendency is present in the whimsicalities of Marianne Moore and Mina Loy," he wrote, then adding :

> The gentle reader accustomed only to glutinous imitations of Keats, diaphanous dilutations of Shelley, wooly Wordsworthian paraphrases, or swishful Swinburniania will doubtless dart back appalled by Miss Moore's departures from custom ; custom, that is, as the male or female devotee of Palgravian insularity understands that highly elastic term. (Pound, 1918c, 188-9)

10 Ironically, it was not long before Moore corrected Pound's assumptions, dryly, though politely, ruling out the influences he had attributed to her—including his own—to substitute them with a more personal canon, thereby circumventing his emendations while imposing hers.[5] Eliot was more cautious in his analysis of Moore's literary inheritance, though approving of the same "quite new rhythm," ironical use of language, and "almost primitive simplicity of phrase" (Eliot, 1923 ; quoted in Gregory, 44). A few years later, William Carlos Williams took the general appreciation of "Miss Moore" one step further, in a comment that probably summed up her assumed ties with radical revision better than any other. After observing how her "break through all preconceptions of poetic form" made "destruction and creation [...] simultaneous," he attempted to transcribe the disorientation provoked by her texts through a series of heterogeneous metaphors : "a crack in the bowl," "a multiplication, a quickening, a burrowing through, a blasting aside, a dynamization, a flight over," "an anthology of

transit," "a brittle, highly set-off porcelain garden," or "primitive masonry" all formed a catalog of unconnected images of separation for which Williams nevertheless offered the one reading clue Moore had ever accepted to share : "The only help I ever got from Miss Moore toward the understanding of her verse was that she despised connectives." (Williams, 1925 ; quoted in Gregory, 67-73). Most enlightening of all was certainly the process of "acid cleansing" the doctor described at length, famously examining the various steps necessary to poetic correction and the purification of language :

> Miss Moore gets great pleasure from wiping out soiled words or cutting them clean out, removing the aureoles that have been pasted about them or taking them bodily from greasy contexts. For the compositions which Miss Moore intends, each word should first stand crystal clear with no attachments ; *not even an aroma*. As a cross light upon this, Miss Moore's personal dislike for flowers that have both *a satisfying appearance and an odor of perfume* is worth noticing. With Miss Moore a word is a word most when it is separated out by science, treated with acid to remove the smudges, washed, dried and placed right side up on a clean surface. (Williams, 1925 ; quoted in Gregory, 72)

11 Just like H.D.'s craftsmanship metaphor and the departures from Georgian custom celebrated by Pound, Williams's chemical analogy seemed to presuppose a thorough set of revisions as an indispensable preliminary to the clarity and directness of Moore's art, a critical assumption which undoubtedly coincided with the themes and style exhibited by Moore's early poems. While indeed her choice of moral, artistic or natural subject is usually bent on the ironical correction of easy prejudices and distorted perceptions, her elaborate forms rest on carefully chiseled syllabic patterns, introducing strong visual cuts against the natural flow of sentences, and studding the lines with hyphens and dashes that open up spaces for potential elision, dissociation or silence, into the continuity of the poetic material.[6] First published in 1917, "Those Various Scalpels" thus constructs a complex female portrait, taking the analytical logic of the blazon to a climax when the sharpness of similes—scalpels, scimitars, bundle of lances—is relayed by the surgical anatomizing of lines, before questioning the pointedness of the feminine weapons previously listed, if not the accuracy of the very images conjured up by the speaker :

> [...] —are they weapons or scalpels ? Whetted
> To brilliance by the hard majesty of that sophistication which is su-
> Perior to opportunity, these things are rich
> Instruments with which to experiment. We grant you that, but why dissect destiny with instruments
> which
> Are more highly specialized than the tissues of destiny itself ? (Moore, 2002, 262)

12 In a similar way, "The Fish," selected in *The Egoist* a year later, confronts the fluidity of aquatic movement and the hard opacity of the mineral, piercing the surface of the sea only to display the "chasms" and cutting edges of a scarred submarine landscape :

> The Fish
>
> Wade through black jade,
> Of the crow-blue mussel-shells, one
> Keeps adjusting the ash-heaps :
> Opening and shutting itself like

An injured fan,
The barnacles undermine the
Side of the wave—trained to hide
There—but the submerged shafts of the

Sun, split like spun
Glass, move themselves with spotlight swift-
Ness into the crevices—
In and out, illuminating

The turquoise sea
Of bodies. The water drives a
Wedge of iron into the edge
Of the cliff [...]

All external
Marks of abuse are present of
This defiant edifice—
All the physical features of

Accident—lack
Of cornice, dynamite grooves, burns
And hatchet strokes, these things stand
Out on it ; the chasm side is

Dead. Repeated
Evidence has proved that it can
Live on what cannot revive
Its youth. The sea grows old in it. (Moore, 2002, 234)

13 Reproducing the hindered transition between the title and the first line, the stanza pattern, for all its regularity, imposes jutting angles which keep interrupting the natural flow of the sentences, thus putting into relief clusters of hard consonants ("*spl*it like *sp*un/*gl*ass," "the water *dr*ives a we*dge*/of iron through the e*dge*/of the *cl*iff"), turning the prepositions, conjunctions and copulas into breaks rather than links (the suspension of "like" at the end of the first stanza thus reveals the potential artifice of the comparison for example), or betraying irreducible fractures beneath the deceivingly unifying rhymes, whether in meaning or in sound (the internal eye rhyme of "dead" and "repeated" in the last stanza echoed by that opposing "live" and "cannot revive" forbids any definite resolution of the poem in a celebration of resilience). Though rooted in a more terrestrial milieu, "Radical," the description of a carrot possibly hiding a self-portrait of the red-haired avant-garde poet herself,[7] rests on a comparable pattern where the indentation of gradually expanding lines, corrected by a return to the left margin every seven lines, maintains a subtle balance between growth and containment, freedom and constraint, writing and crossing out :

Tapering
to a point, conserving everything,
this carrot is predestined to be thick.
The world is

but a circumstance, a mis-
erable corn-patch for its feet. With ambition,
imagination, outgrowth,
nutriment,
with everything crammed belligerent-
ly inside itself, its fibres breed mon-
opoly—
a tail-like, wedge shaped engine with the
secret of expansion, fused with the intensive heat
to the color of the set-
ting sun and
stiff. [...] (Moore, 2002, 239)

14 Machine-like, the poem, as much as the vegetable it observes, is shown in the process of its development, as it slowly ingests the linguistic nutriments that seem to come in its way, adding up strings of Latinate polysyllables to its compact, "stiff" and "tail-like" "fibres," feeding on each new prefix, suffix or *-ing* endings which aggregate with its root, *radix*. However, while the rhythmical and visual scheme seem to follow the same mode of expansion, they rapidly contain any tendency to anarchic growth. Faithful to the "radical" principle summed up in its title, guided by a "wedge shaped" pattern that seems at once naturally encoded and fixed by poetic choice, each new line follows a predetermined course and regular syllable count, at times stopping short and splitting words in order to correct possible excrescences, and regulate, if need be, the adverse influences of the surrounding environment.

15 Ironically enough, control over exterior contingency was not infallible. When it first appeared in a 1919 issue of *Others*, the text included a type-setting error, a duplicated line which, because of the magazine's financial and editorial difficulties, was only crossed out by hand on each published copy. Nevertheless, however circumstantial and ill fitted it may seem, the correction unwittingly reveals the care with which Moore continuously emended her own work. Any survey of the poem drafts, kept at the Rosenbach Museum and Library along with the rest of Moore's archive, will quickly reveal the importance of revision at all stages of her creative process, including abundant preliminary note taking, handwritten composition, type-written pages and carbon copies often comprising manuscript alterations, and emended editorial proofs. No doubt this series of stages, common to many modernist writers, as we have seen, was particularly encouraged by Moore's secretarial training and professional experience as a teacher, librarian, and editor. Nonetheless, the poet's typing and classifying skills cannot entirely account for her obsessive reworking of texts. As Moore scholars know all too well, her revisions were far from being limited to the genetic prehistory of texts, but continued long after publication in magazine or even book form. Of the poems mentioned above, all three were thoroughly altered before even appearing in Moore's first authorized collection, *Observations*. After featuring in *The Lantern*, Bryn Mawr's alumni periodical, "Those Various Scalpels" was republished in William Carlos Williams's and Robert McAlmon's *Contact* magazine—which in turn served as the basis for the *Observations* version—, not without including a few linguistic and visual alterations, most significantly in the concluding lines. Similarly, "The Fish" is much less known and studied in its original form than in a later version, revised for the 1919 *Others* anthology and showing a different syllabic pattern which accentuates

the ruptures at work in the poem. Replacing the four-line presentation, the new text was thus arranged in eight indented six-line stanzas causing the first and third lines of each to split, after the model of the first stanza :

The Fish

wade
through black jade.
of the crow blue mussel shells, one
keeps
adjusting the ash heaps
opening and shutting itself like [...] (Moore, 2002, 85)

16 In the same vein, Moore did not hesitate to alter the “radical” version of her carrot portrait, first cutting off a reference to slavery, before turning the seven-line original to a more clearly spaced ensemble of four six-line stanzas, the first three ending in longer nineteen-syllable lines, while the newly arranged conclusion to the whole poem strikingly reworked the final equilibrium, reading “that which it is impossible to force, it is impossible / to hinder” instead of “that which it is impossible to force, it is im- / possible to hinder” (Moore, 2002, 90).

17 Such a practice was by no means reserved to Moore’s own texts. As editor of the prestigious *Dial* magazine from 1925 to 1929—a role she fulfilled with such dedication that she stopped writing poems during the interval—Moore was renowned for her meticulous readings, if not her finicky comments according to some unsuccessful contributors. This four-year period is filled with professional mail—internal letters, acceptance or rejection slips, proof sheets—which all betray the strongly reductive and corrective tendency of her editorial style. Despite the house policy, which stipulated that a selected text should not be modified, Moore did not hesitate to suggest some extremely precise changes, in an epistolary style that was not any less acute. Some exchanges remained cordial, as when, for instance, Moore politely submitted some changes to Robert Hillyer’s poem “Remote” : “May we, however, make so bold, despite the exactions of symmetry, as to ask if you would permit us to publish it *without the last line—and would the sequence, to you, be irreparably impaired if the third stanza were omitted* ?” (Moore, 1997, 212 ; emphasis mine). Other discussions took a less friendly tone. Maxwell Bodenheim who would complain about “the harshly exacting, complete-perfection-or-rejection attitude of a magazine which offers a leniently appreciative eye and persistently numerous acceptances to anything written by Mr. E. E. Cummings, Mr. Malcolm Cowley, and other poets” (quoted in Moore, 1997, 213), would receive the following type of falsely neutral response :

Dear Mr. Bodenheim :
I was not aware of your having published work other than that which you have deemed worthy of preservation. In respect to my concept of your concept of woman, I would say that although the words quoted in my review were those of a character in your book rather than your own, you in no way made it apparent that the view expressed was at variance with your own. If I have misled any person, I am glad to think that he may revert to you, yourself, and to your books for his final concepts. *In returning your “Poetic Essay,”* The Dial *congratulates you upon lines nine to fourteen inclusive.* (Moore, 1997, 218 ; emphasis mine)

18 But the most famous case of editorial contention has certainly remained the one opposing Marianne Moore and Hart Crane over the publication of the latter's poem "The Wine Menagerie," which title *The Dial* editor suggested changing to "Again" while requesting a number of alterations Kenneth Burke would later sum up by declaring she had taken all the wine from the menagerie. Crane reacted with less humor : though his financial situation forced him to accept the revisions, he privately complained that between Moore and Margaret Anderson, poetry was in the hands of two "hysterical virgins."[8]

"Propriety" : Revision as Rectification

19 Biased and severe as they might seem, Bodenheim and Crane's criticisms would seem to inflect Moore's portrait as a radical reviser. From her dedicated allies to her more cautious critics, from her early champions to her late year *protégés*, most of her contemporaries have expressed their bafflement at the peculiar association of unconventional poetics, progressive ethics and yet conservative manners embodied by Moore, and even more clearly crystallized by her mother's omnipresent influence. While Bryher's 1925 roman à clef *West* could feature Moore as Anne Trollope, a XIXth century British-looking poet reminiscent, along with her mother, of an "engravin[g] from an early Victorian novel," (Bryher, 40) if not a "prehistoric creature, half bird and half dinosaur" (*ibid.*), Elizabeth Bishop, in her fond memoir of her mentor, recalled the two women as "what some people might call 'prudish,'" though "it would be kinder to say 'over-fastidious,'" likely to chide the young author for writing such "improper" words as "spit" or "water-closet" (478), thus showing the persistence of Moore's anachronistic style. In light of such testimonies, revision therefore appears as a conservative tendency, as much as a revolutionary practice. Although Moore's radical use of the blue-pencil is undeniable, her corrections also need to be read as a means of ad*just*ment and *rect*ification, meant to *set* the text *right* by *striking* it *through*, along the lines fixed by moral and linguistic propriety alike. Unlike Stein, Williams, Reznikoff or Zukofsky who, according to Charles Bernstein, managed "to create a new world in English, a new word for what they called America" precisely because "they were second speakers of English or children of second-language speaker" (147), Moore, it would seem, managed to negotiate a writing space within the very bounds of her genteel American education, under the corrective influence of her mother, a former English teacher and devout Presbyterian who consistently interfered with her daughter's attitudes and language :

> [Mrs Moore's] manner toward Marianne was that of a kindly, self-controlled parent who felt that she had to take a firm line, that her daughter might be given to flightiness or—an equal sin, in her eyes—mistakes in grammar. She had taught English at a girls' school and her sentences were Jonsonian in weight and balance. (Bishop, 1984, 477)

20 Left to her own means though, Moore proved as scrupulous as her mother. Typographic exactitude was obviously crucial to a poet who could remark about Henry James : "Our understanding of human relations has grown—more perhaps than we realize in the last twenty years ; and when Henry James disappoints us by retaining the Northerner's feeling about the Confederate, we must not make him directly contemporary, *any more than we dispute his spelling 'peanut' with a hyphen*" (Moore, 1986, 316 ; emphasis mine). Her own verbal combinations seemed almost meant to put the type-setter to test, when

an expected punctuation sign was withdrawn ("What Are Years" was thus supposed to be written without a question mark, despite her editors' wishes), or when minute permutations were introduced into the text, challenging readers to carefully discriminate between "pin-swine" and "swine-pin," "bell-boy" and "buoy-ball" or "glass-eyes" and "eye-glasses," a tendency the author herself would later deride :

Annoyances abound. We should not find them lethal—a baffled printer's emendations for instance (my "elephant with frog-colored skin" instead of "fog-colored skin" and "the power of the invisible is the invisible" instead of the "power of the visible is the invisible" sounding like a parody on my meticulousness, a glasshopper instead of a grasshopper. (Moore, 1961, 269)

21 Far from signaling the revolutionary liberation of signs on the page, her use of typography was the most visible expression of the poet's linguistic meticulousness, and of her broader intellectual concern for exact perception, whether in the field of scientific inquiry or that of philosophical reflection. Just as in "Four Quartz Crystal Clocks" she could celebrate the rigorous protocol guaranteeing exact time transmission as a counterpoint to the falsifications of speech in troubled times of war, she insistently commented on the need to remedy the faults of imprecise language, weighty syntax, inappropriate vocabulary, or excessive rhetoric. Her lasting defiance for hyperbole and verbal waffling was for instance crystallized in a late piece, published successively under the titles "Ocasionem Cognosce" and "I've Been Thinking" before being collected as "Avec Ardeur" in the *Complete Poems* :

Avec Ardeur

Dear Ezra, who knows what cadence is.

I've been thinking—mean, cogitating :

Make a fuss
and be tedious.

I'm annoyed.
Yes ; am. I avoid

"adore"
and "bore" ;

am, I
say by

the word
(bore) bored.

I refuse
to use

"divine"
to mean

something
pleasing :

"terrific color"
for some horror.
[...]
Without pauses,
the phrases

lack lyric
force, unlike

Attic,
Alcaic,

or freak
calico-Greek.

22 Under the aegis of Ezra Pound, master in revision, the poem presents a defense of poetic fussiness along with a lesson in stylistic correction. The long column of tight couplets, interspersed with a few single lines and tercets, each line no more than five-, or more rarely six- and seven-syllable-long, forbids any stereotyped rhythmical pattern, while transposing into the space of the page the remedy it proposes against cliché and verbal inflation. At the scale of each stanza, the abundant typographical signs—dashes, parentheses, or quotation marks—manifest the continuous emendations at work within the flow of a seemingly spontaneous and spoken confession, mimicking the twists and turns of the speaker's cogitation in progress. The poem therefore unfolds along a series of lexical adjustments and rejections, against the excesses and devaluation of trite language—those hyperbolic "word diseases" which plague conversation. Paradoxically though, the speaker rapidly contradicts her own statement as she turns her catalog of stale phrases into a vivid repertoire of rhyming and musical words, displaying her own mastery of cadence, while denying the piece any poetic value, in an ultimate revising gesture : "This is not verse / of course."

23 Thus cracked with irregularities and ironies, the prescriptive surface of the poem finally enables a subtler grasp of the poet's corrective bias, hinted at by a reversal in the revisionary structure of the text. After discarding one verbal cliché after another, and before concluding on a twice negative apothegm ("nothing mundane is divine ; / nothing mundane is divine"), the poem proposes a brief series of more positive counter-examples, listing up several odd-sounding words obviously immune to overuse. If, the poem tells us, they "do not lack / lyric force," "Attic," "Alcaic," or "Freak / calico-Greek" mostly evoke Moore's taste for collections of exotic species and rare objects, be it in real or paper form. Read more closely, the words do not sound alike so much as they introduce a principle of discordance within their very network of meaning : while "Attic" sends back to Athens' ancient civilization, and by extension, characterizes the purity and refinement of style, "Alcaic" refers to a more complex manner, since it points to "a complicated variation of a dominant iambic pattern" (Webster). The twist is further accentuated in the next couplet, as the whimsicality of

"freak" finds expression in the compound-adjective "calico-Greek," a fanciful coinage combining the sobriety of classical arts and the variegations of an Indian printed fabric. Wildly departing from regular lexical and poetic patterns, the text ends up following its own erratic path, correcting its trajectory to wander off onto more unexpected roads. It therefore turns out that if Moore's style is normative, the norm it complies with is more personal and contingent than established by pre-existing conventions.

24 By no means limited to the realm of poetic invention alone, this reassessment touches upon the very question of language and its rules. Certainly, English, for Moore, was far from representing the negative horizon against which Isabelle Alfandary suggests American authors needed to invent their own tongue, even if it meant twisting, unraveling, and crossing the root out to better mark off the difference of their own "litté-rature" (111-119). As we have seen, Moore's family background and education seemed to exclude any internal conflict with the "mother tongue," be it literary English or genteel American, and many critics have indeed underlined the propriety of her speech and writing, from Glenway Wescott who recognized the signs of an "aristocratic" art in her verse, to T.S. Eliot who rather identified the influence of superior college education. However proper her language might have sounded though, Moore was as fascinated by the peculiarities of regional, social or individual languages as she was by standard English, as she later confessed in an interview with Donald Hall :

> The accuracy of the vernacular ! That's the kind of thing I am interested in, am always taking down little local expressions and accents. I think I should be in some philological operation or enterprise, am really much interested in dialect and intonations. (Moore, 1961, 254)

25 Starting in the first decades of the century, at a time of harsh linguistic and cultural debates, where the value of a specifically American tongue had to be asserted by such initiatives as H.L. Mencken's full length study of *The American Language* (1919) or the collaborative tracts issued by the Society for Pure English for the promotion of a more inclusive, though rigorous, exploration of English, Moore's enduring fascination for the variety of idioms took her even further. Not only was she an assiduous reader of Mencken's or the Society's works, more or less directly alluded to in texts like the poem "England" or *The Dial*'s editorial comments, but she also pursued her own "philological operation," keeping a "conversation notebook" in which she jotted down felicitous remarks or particular turns of speech that would regularly find their way into her texts, spangling the fabric of her speech, calico-like, with pieces of regional dialects, specific sociolects, or more individual peculiarities.

26 Oddly enough, this incorporation of difference, though it invalidates the notion of a standardized norm underlying Moore's revisions, does not exactly eliminate any corrective instinct. Rather, it almost seems to turn it back against the poet's own tongue, highlighting the very oddities that make it depart from common language. So Robert Pinsky suggests, when gently mocking the "effect of conceivably deliberate distortion" separating Moore's words from the baseball jargon she tries to imitate in her poem "Hometown Piece for Messrs. Alston and Reese" (Pinsky, 20). So does Elizabeth Bishop confirm, as she exposes the "unscientific theory that Marianne [Moore] was possessed of a unique, involuntary sense of rhythm, therefore of meter, quite unlike anyone else's" and "from birth, had been set going to a different rhythm" (139-140) which had not sought to shape the radical poetics of Modernism so much as it had found an opportune field of expression in it. And so did innumerable critics, who

would try to pinpoint, admiringly or grudgingly, Miss Moore's innumerable idiosyncrasies, a notion the poet herself would study consistently, in animals and men alike, in behavior and speech, through particular author's works or from a more theoretical angle. In her essay "Idiosyncrasy and Technique" for example (Moore, 1986, 506-518), she thus significantly associated patient craft and artistic know-how to what Robert Pinsky defines as the identity ("sameness") of one's constitution ("crasis"), or in other words, the artist's ungraspable but perfectly distinctive signature.

The Vanishing Line of Elision

"Tapering to a Point" ? The Never-Ending Finishing Touches

27 Evolving from a sign of normative meticulousness to the idiosyncratic expression of style, Moore's revisionary practice would therefore seem to bring us back to the figure of the craftsman or the modernist genius, endlessly tinkering her work in a tongue and to an end that only she would truly know. One might then be tempted to read emendations, thus set to the norm of individual creation alone, as striving for an ideally finished masterpiece, enacting, as Pierre-Marc de Biasi explains, "a teleological simulation that projects the ambition of the definitive at the very heart of incompletion" (4 ; translation mine). In this light, Moore's work could possibly recall the ideal collection projected by Wallace Stevens, a poet she deeply admired and whose writing was obsessively directed towards the achievement of a final, irreversible *opus*, as Juliette Utard demonstrates in *Wallace Stevens, le vers et l'irréversible* (2005). But while Stevens, who consistently destroyed his drafts, multiplied the finishing touches with a view to actually finishing his work, completion, for Moore, seems to have known no end. Publication meant neither the form of renunciation that Paul Valéry regretted when he confided that one never finishes a work, but abandons it, nor the "total masterpiece" the Mallarmean Book aspired to become, but a simple grouping of pages, a series of proofs the writer never ceased to emend. When *errata* seemed necessary, no "correct version" of the text was ever established, systematically and once and for all. Rather, revisions remained diffuse and progressive, not unlike the operations of an artisanal process, through which no (re)creation is made to look like another, as a glance at her annotated publications quickly shows. If indeed, as we have suggested, her texts were frequently reworked before a new edition, it was not unusual for Moore to alter, by hand and on the very book or magazine page, an already published poem. A copy of her 1921 *Poems*, signed for the Williamses and kept at the University of Pennsylvania, bears a strikingly high number of revisions, from crossed-out titles to modified punctuation. Behind this gesture, Moore certainly sought to compensate for the editorial role she had not been able to play in the composition of the volume, released in England by H.D. and Bryher, without her full consent. However, the alterations she made did not exactly express any firm preference, since they would keep changing well after the publication of the poet's first authorized collection, a few years later. Printed periodicals could easily undergo the same fate : by a mysterious course, a revised contribution to *Close-Up* would end up on the shelves of a second-hand bookstore, before being discovered by Joseph Cornell who, in a 1943 letter, would marvel at the "published article [...] corrected like proof in handwriting of such exquisite precision and delicacy that it gave [him] the feeling that it belonged to it's [sic] author" (Rosenbach Museum and Library, V :12). Not even the final act of the

Complete Poems, and the seemingly irrevocable elisions they contain have fixed the author's *corpus* once and for all, since there is not one but two versions of them, the second, published in 1981, integrating new pieces and corrections added by the author after 1967. In this perspective, the *Complete Poems* do not really differ from her previous *Selected* or *Collected Poems*, whose titles manifest the arbitrary choices of the grouping with less ambiguity, but rather inscribe themselves within the long line of books in which Moore usually combined new and already published poems, as if they all formed one single, continuous and endlessly revised collection.

28 One then realizes how complex the task is for anyone facing such a relentless proofreader, unable to decide which version to fix his attention on. Confronted to such an unstable corpus, Robin Shulze has suggested reading Moore's evolving work along the lines of "textual Darwinism," a notion adapted from Stevens Parrish's criticism of the Whig teleological interpretations of Romantic literature, and which, applied to the poet, seems more than an editorial metaphor :

> Certainly, in terms of textual and editorial theory, we still have our creationist critics who, despite historical, physical evidence to the contrary, cling to the romantic belief that texts have a single perfect and special creation at the hands of their authors. Unconcerned with any historical record of textual changes, such critics trust that the text that they have in hand is the text that has always been and always will be. We also still have our textual Christian evolutionists, critics who freely admit the physical evidence of textual change and diligently record substantive variants. Looking at the paleontology of the text, however, they see evidence of directed, intended change for the better. The author's final—or latest—version stands as the perfected fruition of a gradually unfolding design. [...] Last, but not least (or best), we have our textual Darwinists who look at the evolutionary record of a text and see, not progress toward a predetermined goal, but a series of local adaptations—the text adjusted again and again, to suit the author's sense of its fitness in relation to the pressures of the author's changing social, cultural, and textual conditions. [...] Texts do not become better or worse, they simply become different as the world around them changes ; each version achieves its own kind of fitness "in relation to conditions." (Schulze, 274-5)

29 If the evolutionist paradigm therefore concentrates on the minute variations of each text, without privileging any original or final intention, one understands what Moore's revisionary practice entails for the constitution of any *corpus* and, more broadly, for her integration into Modernism's revolutionary project at large. When Pound urged the modern artist to "make it new," the relative indeterminacy of his terms certainly allowed for flexible adaptations and continuous renewals, but it seemed to exclude neither the idea of a fixed referent—language, literature, history—, nor the horizon of a definitive modernist monument beyond its successive reworkings, as the relentless elaboration of *The Cantos* suggest. Conversely, when Moore "makes it new," her corpus, like an ever-changing organism, does not start afresh so much as it varies, mutates and ramifies, on an evolutionary rather than a revolutionary mode, excluding historical ruptures and teleological readings. Her works form no more of a modernist *opus* than a stabilized corpus, and they are no more complete than they are unfinished, which would already presuppose a guiding line, however tentative. Quite to the contrary, they discreetly shatter preexisting patterns of literary history, confronting radical breaks with continuous variations, and stabilized chronologies with multiplying time lines.

"A Note on the Notes" : the Corpus as Appendix

30 Looking back at Moore's editorial revisions however, one cannot but recognize the ominous signs of a brutal catastrophe in the evolutionary course of her works. One remembers how the title of her last collection was immediately contradicted by a discreet yet resolute epigraph, establishing elision as the true guiding principle behind the "complete" poems. The discomfort felt by readers accustomed to her works and by critics in search of extensive texts, has inspired many thorough studies, among which Andrew Kappel's synthesis "Complete with Omissions : The Text of Marianne Moore's Complete Poems." As he explains, the structure of the collection rests, like several others before it, on the order proposed by Eliot's edition of Moore's 1935 *Selected Poems*, starting with the early 1930s publications, before coming back to a selection from her 1924 *Observations*—from which many poems had already undergone severe cuts—, then proceeding in chronological order up to the most recent texts. If a few former pieces were restored, the disappearance of many others, including early poems such as "Radical," cut surprising holes into the expected progression of her works, more particularly affecting her avant-garde beginnings. And if some more fortunate poems have made it into the final selection, it is sometimes only to find themselves amputated of copious amounts of lines, if not whole stanzas. Most emblematic is certainly the much studied example of "Poetry," Moore's closest equivalent to an *ars poetica*, not only because it exemplifies her predilection for the most instinctual definition of poetical writing, but also because of the innumerable revisions the piece was reshaped by. As Robin Schulze summarizes, the poem was first published in a 1919 issue of *Others*, as a thirty-line poem, organized in five syllabic stanzas, before turning into a four-stanza poem of twenty-nine lines for the first edition of *Observations* in 1924. One year later, the second edition of the collection contained a much altered piece, reduced to thirteen lines of free verse. The 1930s would mark a return to longer syllabic versions of the poem, though with a still unfixed pattern, including a modified form of the 1924 poem published in the 1935 *Selected Poems*, then again in the 1951 *Collected Poems*. After two more decades of editorial changes and restored versions, Moore would finally deal the final blow by cutting off the near entirety of her piece, reducing it to its paradoxical three-line introduction :

> I, too, dislike it.
> Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in
> it, after all, a place for the genuine. (Moore, 1981, 36)

31 Under the effect of this ultimate and most radical slash, Moore's *ars poetica* does not so much reiterate long tested techniques of compression and efficiency, as it enacts the author's refusal to achieve a poetic *oeuvre*. Though perfectly audible in her reply to William Butler's notebook remark "I don't greatly like poetry myself," the persona seemingly orchestrates the author's withdrawal, behind the figure of a critical reader, evoking Moore's claimed reluctance to call herself a poet—"I'm not Columbus discovering America. I'm a worker with words, that's all," she declared on receiving the National Medal for Literature in 1968 (Sprague, 185)—or even to identify her texts as poems—"Avec Ardeur" has given us a sample of her customary dodging of the term. And yet, the poem suggests, it is only once one's preconceived definitions of the genre and conditioned respect for high-flown art have been ruled out, that "genuine" poetry can arise, within the margins of an elided text, or in the space lying between cast-off words and remaining lines. Precisely, the final version of "Poetry" cannot quite be

separated from the 1951 twenty-nine line version Moore agreed to place in an appendix, transferring part of her writing into the recesses of the peritext, a gesture that, though it was recommended by her editor, Moore finally recognized as "consistent with her poetics" (Schulze, 279). The inclusion of a body of notes was not a late invention of Moore's. Partly inspired by T.S. Eliot's additions to *The Waste Land*, Moore had started to develop her own system of endnotes as early as 1924, with the publication of *Observations*. More than a biographical apparatus acknowledging the sources of Moore's abundant quotations, with more or less authentic scrupulosity, the notes were to become a creative space in itself, allowing for further developments as well as ironical discordances, as would be revealed, for instance, by a poem like "Tom Fool at Jamaica," in which a horse-race only provides a pretext for the author's own tom-foolery, subverting the apparent seriousness of the critical appendix through proliferating notes—longer than the poem itself—undermining its claim to brevity through endless gloss or mixing academic references and low-brow culture. As if to add one final ironical revision to her notes, Moore inserted a cautionary "note on the notes" in her 1951 *Collected Poems*, which she would later reproduce in the *Complete Poems*, provokingly advising the reader to "disregard the notes." Just like her epigraph, "the note on the notes" therefore plays an ambiguously revisionary role. If the former invites readers to accept the poet's elisions as voluntary while spurring them to look for the missing parts, it would appear that the latter deflects their attention from the notes only to encourage them to proceed further into the appendix and even possibly, to venture into the layers of papers, notes, drafts, revised versions Moore patiently accumulated and classified, before bequeathing them, along with her full living-room, to the Rosenbach Museum and Library. Viewed in the light of these critical and archival additions, Moore's revising practice finally appears as more positive and talkative process than it seemed at first. As the corpus is drained into its own margins, elisions act as invisible footnotes, drawing "the serious reader," as Moore hoped hers to be, into the periphery of the text, be it within or without the book. Displacing the authority of an impossible *opus* towards the more secretive and flexible space of its margin, Moore's unstable work therefore provides an alternative to the "hard" monumentality of such a foundational *oeuvre* as Pound's and invite us to redefine our very methods of reading Modernism at large, breaking up the straight line of the revolutionary project to embrace the more layered and playfully reticent temporality of revision.

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NOTES

1. The choice of typography in the title is intended as a reference to Moore's own use of emendation (a poem entitled "Radical" was deleted from her *Complete Poems*, among other famous revisions), but it also aims at suggesting that the paradigm of revolutionary radicalism may not be the most significant in her case.

2. "[T]he labor required to make *The Cantos*, *Ulysses*, *"A,"* and Stein's writing legible has to be justified, ultimately, by the value that the writing embodies, but that value has most often to be transmitted through hearsay as the writing remains illegible or semilegible for any reader who is not a Poundian, Joycean, Steinian, or—if such a category exists yet—a Zukofskian. Unlike, say, Dickens, where criticism disturbs the consumable clarity of the surface to reveal additional meaning beneath, with these four, unreadability is the raw material that is turned into the finished product of significance, which then gives the works their social importance." (Perelman, 1994, 1)

3. This interpretation was suggested by Pound himself, in a 1932 letter : "I wonder how far the Mauberley is merely a translation of the Homage to S.P., for such as couldn't understand the latter" (quoted in Sullivan, 291).

4. "When studying physics we are not asked to investigate the biographies of all the disciples of Newton who showed interest in science, but who failed to make any discovery. Neither are their unrewarded gropings, hopes, passions, laundry bills, or erotic experiences thrust upon the hurried student or considered germane to the subject" (Pound, 1954, 15).

5. After writing his first reviews on Moore, Pound sent her a personal letter in which he suggested a series of emendations to Moore's poem "Old Tiger," offered editorial help, and questioned the intriguing new author on her geographic, familial and artistic backgrounds. In

her reply, Moore happily complied with most of his suggestions, though she added : “The resemblance of my progress to your beginnings is an accident so far as I can see. I have taken great pleasure in both your prose and your verse, but it is what my mother terms the saucy parts, which have most fixed my attention. [...] I like a fight but I admit that I have at times objected to your promptness with the cudgels. I say this merely to be honest. I have no Greek, unless a love for it may be taken as knowledge and I have not read very voraciously in French ; I do not know Ghil and Laforgue and know of no tangible French influence on my work. Gordon Craig, Henry James, Blake, the minor prophets and Hardy, are so far as I know, the direct influences bearing on my work” (Moore, 1997, 122-3).

6. Other critics were less enthusiastic about Moore’s radical cuts, which they deemed too contrived and unpoetic. In a tepid review of the poet’s work, Harriet Monroe thus synthetized the more negative assessment of her technique : “What I do find in these poems is a brilliant array of subtly discordant harmonies not unlike those of certain ultra-modern composers, set forth in stanza-forms purely empirical even when emphasized by rhyme, forms which impose themselves arbitrarily upon word-structure and sentence-structure instead of accepting happily the limitations of the art’s materials, as all art must. When Miss Moore sets the first syllable of the word accident as a whole line to rhyme with lack, or the article a as a line to rhyme with the end of Persia ; when she ends a stanza in a split infinitive, or in the middle of the swift word very —indeed, anywhere in the middle of words or sentences, she is forcing her pattern upon materials which naturally reject it, she is giving a wry twist even though her aim is a grotesque ; and when her aim is more serious, such verbal whimsicalities strike at once the intensely false note of affectation” (Monroe, 1922 ; quoted in Gregory, 35).

7. For interpretations of “Radical” as a feminist avant-garde self-portrait of the poet, see Robin Schulze (189-192) and Linda Leavell (126-127).

8. For more details on the relationships between Moore and Crane, see Evan Hughes, 54-91. If the episode suggests her revisions were only moralistic and inspired by excessive modesty, Moore often made an explicit—although neither revolutionary, nor reactionary—connection between moral virtue and a precise, compact, if not terse writing style, as can be seen in the poems “To a Snail,” “Silence,” or “Avec Ardeur” for example.

ABSTRACTS

From the editorial birth of Imagism to the preliminary pruning of *The Waste Land*, the dominant narratives of Modernism have often been built on foundational acts of crossing out, whether self-imposed, collective or allographic. Since they combine the erasure of past verbal excesses and the endeavor of compression on the page, such slashes of the “creative pencil” (H.D.), aptly seem to enact and materialize the revolutionary dynamics of rejection and renewal that most writers and critics have chosen to foreground over alternative paradigms of change. Leading us from the working manuscript to the little magazine, from the individual collection to the endlessly emended *magnum opus*, from the anthology to the text-book, the practice of revision, then, retraces the historical construction of literary revolution(s), highlighting lines of rupture and continuity as certain names are marginalized or simply deleted.

Because, among them, Marianne Moore was herself a relentless editor of her own or others’ words, yet has remained a shifting figure in the “great narrative” of Modernism, her work allows us to re-examine the claims of artistic radicalism, in the light of more complex modes of revision.

Although she may indeed have styled herself as a "radical" (as the title of an early hidden-portrait in verse suggests), and was rapidly hailed as such by her peers, her revising practice opens up the spectrum of transformations to more ambiguous models. While her textual experiments betray a secret pull towards correction and propriety, her tinkering with words evokes the patient chiseling of the craftsman rather than the stroke of genius, or the fanciful errata of natural evolution over historical catastrophe. Wavering between abundant working notes and notoriously truncated publications, between exhaustiveness and silence, between endless starts and the ever-receding horizon of completion, Moore's unstable *corpus* thus contributes to the redefinition of creative revolution.

De la naissance éditoriale de l'Imagisme à l'élagage préliminaire de *The Waste Land*, les récits dominants du modernisme se sont souvent bâtis sur l'acte fondateur d'une rature, qu'elle soit personnelle, collective ou allographique. Combinant l'effacement d'excès littéraires passés et la recherche de compression à l'échelle de la page, de telles entailles paraissent matérialiser de façon idéale la dynamique du rejet et du renouveau préférée, par nombre d'auteurs, à des paradigmes du changement moins drastiques. Du manuscrit au petit magazine, du recueil au grand œuvre sans cesse retravaillé, de l'anthologie au manuel universitaire, la correction rend ainsi visible la construction même des révolutions littéraires, traçant en filigrane des lignes de rupture et de continuité dans l'histoire, non sans en écarter, voire en escamoter, certains noms.
Parce qu'elle fut elle-même, à l'image de ses contemporains, une correctrice implacable de ses propres textes comme de ceux des autres, mais demeura longtemps une figure inclassable du « grand récit » moderniste, tantôt célébrée comme ouvrière incontournable du mouvement, tantôt considérée comme l'une de ses curiosités marginales, Marianne Moore nous permet de réexaminer les présupposés du radicalisme artistique, à la lumière de modes de révisions plus complexes. Bien que la poète se fût elle-même dépeinte en « radical(e) », et eût été rapidement saluée en ces termes par ses pairs, sa pratique de la correction ouvre en effet le champ des transformations à des modèles plus ambigus. Tandis que ses expériences textuelles trahissent parfois un retour latent au « bon usage » de la langue, son travail des mots évoque quant à lui le patient ciselage de l'artisan, sinon les erratas fantaisistes de l'évolution naturelle, contre tout catastrophisme historique. Oscillant entre l'exhaustivité et le silence, l'abondance des notes et la violence des coupes, les départs sans cesse réitérés et l'horizon asymptotique de l'achèvement, le corpus instable de Moore nous aide ainsi à redéfinir la notion de révolution créatrice.

INDEX

Keywords: revision, Modernism, radicalism, conservatism, idiosyncrasy, corpus, canon

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